

NEW BREAKFAST OPTIONS YIELD SUCCESS



From universal free breakfast to alternative serving options, school foodservice professionals around New England are employing new strategies to get kids to eat breakfast - and finding that more and more children can, and do, take advantage of school breakfast and all of its benefits.

Taking Breakfast to the Classroom

More and more, research underscores the important role of breakfast in improving children's ability to concentrate and learn. So when one of the biggest challenges facing Fitchburg, Massachusetts schools was to improve MCAS test scores, Kristin Morello, general manager for Sodexo, wrote a Universal Breakfast Grant. Morello asked, "How can I eliminate the traditional barriers to school breakfast and fit all the children into one time slot, not the three or four allotted for lunch?" The answer - take it to the classroom! To get system-wide support for the project, everyone from the custodians to principals was asked to "poke holes" in it. The result - a successful program in which all elementary children eat breakfast free in their classrooms daily.



Key to its success has been making **Breakfast in the Classroom** easy for the teachers. "We tried to eliminate teachers' involvement other than it happening in their space," says Morello. Each morning the foodservice staff loads coolers with a wrapped breakfast entrée, milk and juice for every child and takes them to the classrooms. The kids get their breakfast and eat it at a time designated by the teacher. "All the teachers have to do is check off an attendance roster, which they have to do anyway," adds Morello. Classrooms are

equipped with spray bottles, wipes and a trash barrel with extra bags. After the kids eat, they dispose of their trash and if necessary, clean their desks. A custodian, who is paid by foodservice, picks up the trash before lunch, so it doesn't sit in the hallways. Morello also started Breakfast in the Classroom at the middle school, except it's a pay-program. Kids who don't want to eat in the cafeteria can come in at the bell, grab their breakfast, label it with their name and room number, and put it in a cooler. The cooler is delivered to their classroom at 'Fast-Break' - a special 5 or 6 minute time set aside each morning for kids to eat a snack.

One of the benefits, Morello notes, is that the breakfast habit appears to carry over from elementary to middle school. After the first year of universal breakfast in the classroom, Morello compared participation at a middle school with fifth- and sixth-graders who ate universal breakfast the previous year with a middle school in which students did not. In the school where children ate universal breakfast, participation was 30 percent compared to 11 percent in the school where children did not. "The kids were conditioned to want, need and eat breakfast in elementary school," notes Morello.

Grab 'n' Go Breakfasts Take Service to Students

Because the participation rate dropped substantially from elementary school to middle school, Mark Jeffrey, general manager for Sodexo, in Providence, Rhode Island schools pilot-tested universal breakfast in four middle schools last spring, including a **Grab 'n' Go Breakfast** option. Very similar to what the airlines do, a cooler is placed at two school entrances. If they want, students take a breakfast and enter their

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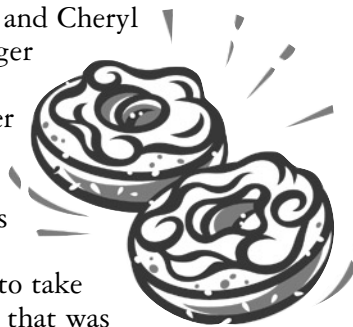


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student number into a computer. If students don't opt for a **Grab 'n' Go Breakfast**, they can still go through the line and get a traditional breakfast. Overall, participation in the four pilot schools increased 19 percent one month into the test - at a time when participation typically drops off. "There's no question that taking the service to the kids makes a difference. Many kids want to be with their friends and come in at the last possible minute, and this option fits that need," says Jeffrey. Based on the pilot-test's success, the Providence School Board approved a system-wide Universal Breakfast Program pilot-test for this school year. **Grab 'n' Go Breakfasts** were so popular that Jeffrey is serving them in all nine middle schools for this year's pilot.

Serving Breakfast After the Bell

Earlene Bosley, foodservice director in Enosberg Falls, Vermont and Cheryl Ottaviano, general manager for Sodexo in Coventry, Rhode Island schools offer another breakfast option - Breakfast After 1st Period. Bosley, who offers the program at the elementary school, decided to take advantage of a snack cart that was already going to classrooms each morning. "Some kids just don't feel like eating in the morning, buses run late or kids have band practice. So we decided to add bagged breakfasts to the cart," says Bosley. Kids can eat breakfast at the traditional breakfast time - 7:45 to 8:10 a.m. - or get it when the snack cart comes to their classroom. "Not only does it help the kids, we serve 20 to 30 breakfasts that we didn't serve before, which is great!" adds Bosley. Each breakfast, packed in a colorful breakfast bag, is often the same food served in the cafeteria. In addition to milk and juice, typical offerings include cereal and toast; muffins; Danish; waffle sticks with syrup; bagels, cream cheese and jelly; or breakfast pizza.



In Coventry, Ottaviano has served breakfast at the middle and high schools for about 10 years. What's new is **Breakfast After 1st Period**, which she started after a poll showed that lack of time was the main reason for low participation. After talking to the administration, she worked out a format that suited each school. At the high school, the cafeteria reopens after homeroom. "Students come into the cafeteria, relax, have breakfast, and do some studying," say Ottaviano. At the middle school it's different - kids are clustered in teams. One at a time, teams come to the cafeteria for a 10-minute break between 8 and 9 a.m. each morning. About one-third come through for school breakfast and about half purchase a la carte items such as English muffin-egg sandwiches, milk or fruit. A 25 percent participation rate at the high school and 20 percent rate at the middle school, attest to the programs' success. Teachers and administrators were part of the process, so they think it's great. "More importantly, they're supportive because the kids eat breakfast, they're quiet and they study," adds Ottaviano. "At the high school especially, teachers note that the disciplinary activity in study halls has decreased."

Expanding Your Breakfast Options

What works in one system, may not work for another - but one thing is certain, expanding breakfast serving options work. "We need to think out of the box to be successful," says Providence's Jeffrey. By thinking creatively, getting the buy-in of administrators and teachers, and identifying obstacles ahead of time, we can bring breakfast and all its benefits to more students than ever!

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